

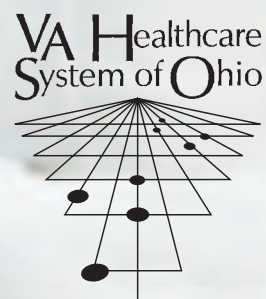
Veterans' Health

SUMMER • 2005

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

VA helps you attack
heart disease

A gift to loved ones:
advance directives



To our readers



Welcome to our summer *Veterans' Health* issue. This season, we're pleased to offer a variety of health topics all relaying a common message—why you should feel good about having VA as your healthcare provider.

One reason we're leading the way in healthcare is all we do to help you manage and prevent health conditions. This includes our "Time Is Life" initiative to help you spot and stop heart attack. See page 4 to learn how to identify your risk factors for heart disease and take the right action should a heart attack strike you or someone you love.

If you have a chronic health condition, such as diabetes, VA offers a way for you to see your doctor faster *and* benefit from a support group. On page 6, find out how shared medical appointments can help you form a better relationship with your primary care provider while you learn from other patients going through similar experiences.

VA also thinks about your future healthcare and wants to make sure you prepare advance directives to protect yourself and those you love. We're here to help you determine important medical decisions now in case you can't make them for yourself someday. See page 5 to learn how we can help you put your future healthcare wishes in writing.

Lastly, on page 7, we offer seasonal tips to keep the fun in your summer. Learn how to protect your skin from the sun's rays and your eyes from injury.

Enjoy the summer in good health!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Network Office

11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200

Cincinnati, OH 45249

Veterans' Health is online at www.va.gov/visn10/. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Visit us online!

For a fast, easy way to learn the many benefits VA Healthcare System of Ohio offers, visit our Web site at www.va.gov/visn10/. From our home page, you can:

- access My HealthVet and the Healthwise Knowledgebase
- learn about VA benefits and services
- find a VA facility nearest you
- connect to the U.S. Government's official Web site

In addition, you can download past *Veterans' Health* issues to revisit health topics most important to you and your family.

Need a computer? Your local VA facility has computers and trainers who can help you get to our site. It's yet another way we're meeting your healthcare needs. **VA**

Veterans' Health Editorial Directors

Suzanne Tate
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Debbie Crabtree
Chillicothe VAMC

Debbie Page
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Joyce Seltzer
Cincinnati VAMC



For the best care anywhere, choose VA

If you could go anywhere for healthcare, would you still choose VA? Yes, said many of you in the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP), a confidential survey mailed to random patients each month. The National Committee for Quality Assurance recently ranked VA as a top leader in patient care in 17 performance measures—and gave it the gold standard seal of approval.

What makes VA so great? Here are three ways we excel:

1. Technology

VA's use of modern technology has greatly improved healthcare for patients and providers. Examples include:

- **Electronic patient records.** Your VA provider can access your current and most up-to-date medical history and treatments anytime and anywhere.
- **Medication bar coding.** Handheld scanners compare bar codes on your inpatient ID bracelet and medications to make sure you get the right drugs at the right time.
- **My HealthVet.** This Web site, which you can visit at www.myhealth.va.gov, helps you learn about a wide range of health topics, VA benefits and services, your wellness and more. You can also get to

My HealthVet from VA Healthcare System of Ohio's Web site at www.va.gov/visn10/.

- **Care coordination.** While you remain at home, care coordinators can monitor your health using a videophone, a computer-like health station and other high-tech devices (see your spring 2005 *Veterans' Health* issue, page 3).

2. Mental health services

To help veterans cope with emotional problems often related to their military service, VA offers a wide range of mental health programs, such as:

- post-traumatic stress disorder programs (winter 2004 *Veterans' Health*, pages 4–5)
- inpatient and outpatient programs for depression, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease and other types of mental health illness
- alcohol and substance abuse programs

3. Home healthcare

Bringing healthcare home helps you and your family maintain quality of life. VA's home-based primary care program offers:

- nursing and social work services as well as physical, occupational and speech therapies
- home health aides to assist you with daily-living activities
- hospice care

VA is proud to be your healthcare provider and wants to be your No. 1 choice for care. To learn more about VA services near you or to view past *Veterans' Health* issues, visit VA Healthcare System of Ohio's Web site at www.va.gov/visn10/. **VH**

More high marks for VA

A 2003 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compared veterans health facilities with fee-for-service Medicare on 11 measures of quality. In all areas, VA was significantly better.

A study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* showed that in seven of seven measures of quality for diabetes treatment, veterans health facilities provided better care than for-profit, managed-care systems.



Every second counts

VA helps you attack heart disease

Could that odd discomfort you're feeling in your chest be a sign you're having a heart attack? Yes! Don't take a chance—call 911 immediately. The longer you wait, the less likely treatment will work ... and your risk of death will increase.

"Many veterans don't come to the hospital until hours after they begin having heart attack symptoms," says Deborah Keller, a cardiology nurse practitioner at Louis Stokes Wade Park VA Medical Center. "Every moment is vital to prevent heart damage and save your life."

VA Healthcare System of Ohio joins VA's nationwide "Time is Life" campaign, which helps veterans prevent, recognize and seek prompt treatment for heart attacks. Our facilities display posters, run videos and distribute brochures that teach you about the warning signs for heart attack, such as chest discomfort or pain, shortness of breath and nausea. The campaign also helps you learn your risk factors for heart disease and plan for fast action should a heart attack strike you. This includes completing a survival plan wallet card that lists your medications and instructions.

If you're taking nitroglycerin pills to relieve chest discomfort or pain, VA wants you to talk to your doctor about new guidelines issued by the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association. The guidelines call for more urgent action—take one dose when you feel chest pain and call 911 immediately if your symptoms don't improve or worsen after five minutes. "Previous guidelines had people waiting longer and taking more doses," says Jose Ortiz, M.D., the director of the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center. "Now we want you to get to the nearest hospital sooner."

To learn more about reducing your heart attack risk, talk to your VA healthcare provider. He or she can help you complete your survival plan wallet card, too. Also visit www.va.gov/cardiology to learn more about heart disease and prevention. **VA**

Learn CPR

Each year, the American Heart Association trains more than 6 million people to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). CPR combines chest



Act fast!

If you're faced with a heart attack, don't drive to your local VA medical center or hospital. Call 911. Emergency care professionals have the training and equipment to start lifesaving treatment right away and will get you to the nearest hospital quickly by ambulance.

compressions and rescue breathing for people experiencing cardiac arrest. This keeps blood flowing to the heart, brain and other vital organs before medical experts arrive to provide more advanced treatment. Empower yourself to save a life. Visit www.americanheart.org to find a training class near you.

A gift to loved ones

Advance directives make your healthcare wishes known

Life is a one-way journey, and planning for how and when the trip will end is not easy to do. But it's important that you make decisions about your future medical care while your health still allows you to do so—and to put those wishes in writing. To help those closest to you and ensure your wishes are followed, prepare your advance directives while you're in good health.

"The Terri Schiavo case highlighted the need for having advance directives," says Nancy Withers, M.S.W., L.I.S.W., a supervisor in primary care at Chillicothe VA Medical Center. "Many people want to spare their families from making those hard decisions."

What are advance directives?

Advance directives are written instructions about your medical care in the form of a **living will** or **durable power of attorney for healthcare**. These instructions don't go into effect until you are no longer able to make decisions as a result of an injury or illness.

In a living will, you state your wishes about life-sustaining treatment and spell out exact measures you would choose or refuse. These can include the use of breathing machines, feeding tubes, oxygen and intravenous fluids. You may also list specific conditions such as coma, incurable illness and end-stage dementia, under which the terms of your living will go into effect. A durable power of attorney for healthcare appoints a family member or friend to follow your wishes about end-of-life care if you can't make treatment decisions for yourself. In Ohio, you can combine both directives in one document.

It's important to write advance directives while you're competent, no matter what your age is. "Many young veterans are writing advance directives," says Withers. "Many don't have a spouse or someone they can trust to

make healthcare decisions for them. A living will protects their values and wishes."

Getting started

To prepare your advance directives, ask to see a social worker or chaplain at your nearest VA medical center. He or she will explain the medical issues and treatment choices to consider and will give you an information booklet to take home and share with your family. When you return, you'll fill out and sign your advance directives. Two witnesses will also sign them. Copies will be placed in your file, and you'll be given extra copies for you and your family. You may change your advance directives any time you wish.

For additional help, visit www.putitinwriting.org. This Web resource recently launched by the American Hospital Association offers easy-to-use information about advance directives, such as a glossary of terms, a wallet card letting healthcare workers know you have an advance directive and tips for communicating your wishes to your loved ones.

Having advance directives doesn't mean efforts to save your life will change. "Of course, doctors will do all they can to save you," says Withers. "You'll receive life-sustaining treatment until it becomes clear there's no hope of your recovery." **VH**



Regular doctor visits are an important part of staying healthy, especially if you have a chronic disease that requires frequent follow-ups. Getting appointments can take time. And, frequent visits can be a hassle. To help address these issues, VA offers **shared medical appointments**. During these appointments, one provider meets with a group of patients at the same time. About 20 patients belong to each group and all share a like health condition, such as diabetes, chronic pain or heart disease.

“Our patients love it,” says Whitney Shaffer, Pharm.D., a clinical pharmacy specialist at the Diabetes Service at Dayton VA Medical Center, who runs a shared medical appointment group for veterans with diabetes.

“They get to spend more face time with their provider. They have more chances to ask questions and can form a better relationship.”

What to expect

If you join a shared medical appointment group, you’ll meet at your provider’s facility. When you arrive, you’ll need to sign a form stating that you agree to follow some ground rules to protect each other’s privacy. “Everything that is discussed in the group stays in the group,” says Dr. Shaffer.

At the start of each appointment, a nurse will check your vital signs, listen to your lungs and weigh you. He or she may examine your feet if you have diabetes. If something needs a closer look, the nurse will tell your provider that you also need a one-on-one visit later on during the appointment. A private exam room is there should it be needed.



Greater health in numbers

Shared medical appointments help you stay well

Your provider may begin the appointment with a discussion of a scheduled topic. Or, he or she may ask about any concerns you’re having. “If one patient is having trouble with a foot sore, we’ll address how to care for and prevent foot sores so all patients can benefit,” says Dr. Shaffer. “The patients really respect and learn from each other. They know they’ve all walked in another’s shoes.”

Same care, more perks

Shared medical appointments are just like regular clinic appointments. Your provider will perform exams, prescribe medications, order diagnostic tests and refer you for other consults as needed. You’ll make co-payments. And, you may still choose to schedule a regular one-on-one appointment with your doctor. To find out if a shared medical appointment group near you can help meet your medical needs, talk to your VA healthcare provider. **VH**



Save your sight

Protect your eyes from injury

About 1 million people suffer eye injuries each year, often during common activities like mowing the lawn, working on the car or playing sports. Yet these accidents can be prevented with simple precautions, says the American Academy of Ophthalmology. In honor of Eye Injury Prevention Month this August, practice these safety measures:

- Check your yard for debris, stones and twigs before using a lawn mower, power trimmer or edger.
- Wear safety goggles to shield your eyes from flying debris, dust, sparks and splashes anytime you

work with tools and chemicals, do yard chores or jump-start a car.

- Get sport-specific protective eyewear with polycarbonate lenses for high-risk activities like baseball and tennis. Wear swim goggles to protect your eyes from organisms in lakes and chlorine in pools.

- Wear sunglasses when outdoors and avoid tanning beds.

If you do suffer an eye injury, don't rub your eyes or apply pressure or medication to them. See your eye doctor or get emergency medical care right away. Delaying treatment can worsen the damage or cause permanent vision loss. **VH**

8 ways to protect yourself against skin cancer

Can't wait to hit the beach this summer? Keep your shirt on—and your hat, sunglasses and sunscreen—because ultraviolet (UV) rays cause more than 90 percent of all skin cancers.

To reduce your risk of skin cancer, follow these tips:

① Cover up with a wide-brimmed hat, a scarf for your neck, a long-sleeved shirt, pants and sunglasses.

② Apply sunscreen in the morning as part of your normal routine. Choose a water-resistant sunscreen with a sun-protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher that blocks UV rays. Apply it to all exposed areas of your body 15 to 30 minutes before going into the sun.

③ Avoid going outdoors between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest.



④ At the beach, reapply sunscreen at least every two hours and after swimming and perspiring.

⑤ Don't use a sun lamp or visit a tanning salon.

⑥ Give yourself a head-to-toe skin examination at least once every six months. Knowing your skin—its bumps, blotches and birthmarks—helps you detect even slight changes. If you notice any changes, see your healthcare provider.

⑦ Have your healthcare provider examine your skin once a year.

⑧ Check your medicine labels. Some drugs require you to stay out of the sun. **VH**

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Lancaster

1550 Sheridan Drive,
Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-553-3236

Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Bellevue
103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Clermont County

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive,
Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn County

710 W. Eads Parkway
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Akron
55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue, #15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City
1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lima
1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown

675 North University Boulevard
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Richmond

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at www.va.gov/visn10/.

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249



PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LEBANON JUNCTION, KY
PERMIT NO. 19